

MINUTES  
City of New Castle Tree Advisory Commission  
Zoom Meeting – September 14, 2020 – 4 p.m.  
New Castle Town Hall

Members Present: Tom Maddux  
Sheila Shannon  
Scot Savitch  
Judi Baldini

Absent: John Antonio, Chairman

Also Present: Ron Vukelich

In Mr. Antonio's absence, Mr. Maddux called the meeting to order at 4:04 p.m. Roll call followed and a quorum to conduct business was declared.

**MINUTES**

**A Motion to approve the Minutes of the August 3, 2020, meeting as amended was made, seconded and unanimously approved.**

**NEW APPLICATIONS**

**602 Delaware Street – John & Laura Riddell**

**600 Delaware Street – Len Regetar**

Two Applications were submitted to remove a large London Plane tree at the corner of 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Delaware Street in front of 600 and 602 Delaware Street. Mr. and Mrs. Riddell were present. The Commissioners identified the exact location of the tree. In support of his Application, Mr. Riddell stated that in addition to uplifting brick on the sidewalk and damaging the alley walkway, the tree has caused excessive damage to his residence, including damage to the roof, gutters, porch, and sewer line, which has caused the Applicant to spend upwards of \$40,000 in repairs over the past 11 years.

After discussion, it was agreed that it was a problem tree that should be removed. Mr. Vukelich suggested that a small group of trees could be replanted on the street.

A Motion to approve the Application to have the London Plane tree at 600/602 Delaware Street was made, seconded and passed unanimously.

**37 East 6<sup>th</sup> Street – Mar. DiAlessandro**

An Application was submitted to remove a tree on the side of the house on Harmony Street that is uplifting the sidewalk and has limbs overhanging the apartments. The Application stated the insurance company said the tree was dangerous to the property. Mr. Savitch noted that the tree is split to accommodate wires and the sidewalk is an issue. He added that two trees in front of 33 East 6<sup>th</sup> Street have similar issues. After discussion the Commissioners were unable to come to a consensus as to whether the tree could be saved or if it should be removed, and it was agreed further investigation was required.

A Motion to table the Application to the October meeting was made, seconded and unanimously approved.

### **138 East 2<sup>nd</sup> Street – Brian & Theresa Rumley**

An application was submitted for permission to have a tree planted. During discussion, Mr. Vukelich suggested that there is an opportunity for the Commission to have 4-5 approved trees planted on the street. It was proposed that Mr. Vukelich consult with the Applicants relative to an approved tree species.

A Motion to have Ron Vukelich consult with Mr. and Mrs. Rumley relative to planting an approved tree species at 138 East 2<sup>nd</sup> Street was made, seconded and unanimously approved.

A Motion to table the Application to the October meeting was made, seconded and unanimously approved.

### **Commission Comments and Discussion**

#### Tree Advisory Commission Consultant

Mr. Maddux recommended that Mr. Ron Vukelich be appointed as an advisor to the Tree Advisory Commission for a one-year term beginning September 14, 2020 and ending September 14, 2021.

A Motion to appoint Mr. Ron Vukelich as an Advisor to the Tree Advisory Commission for a one-year term beginning September 14, 2020 and ending September 14, 2021 was made and seconded.

Ms. Baldini recommended an amendment to the Motion that Mr. Vukelich is a non-voting Consultant. Mr. Maddux withdrew his Motion.

Ms. Baldini made a Motion to appoint Mr. Ron Vukelich as a non-voting Consultant to the Tree Advisory Commission for a one-year term beginning September 14, 2020 and ending September 14, 2021. The Motion was seconded and on vote was unanimously approved.

#### Stump Removal

Mr. Savitch recommended that a large tree stump remaining from a tree taken down on 6<sup>th</sup> Street across from Gebhart's Funeral Home be removed. Mr. Vukelich noted that a few trees could be replanted in the space. In discussion, it was noted that there was some question as to who is responsible for removal of the stump. Mr. Vukelich thought it was not the City's responsibility.

Mr. Maddux will request that Mr. Antonio discuss this issue with the City Administrator for clarification and report back to the Commission.

#### Blocked Signage

Ms. Baldini noted that there are several signs on West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street in front of the New Castle Progressive Club that are being blocked by tree branches. During discussion, it was questioned

whether the Tree Advisory Commission has purview to have the branches trimmed. Mr. Maddux will request that Mr. Antonio discuss this issue with the City Administrator for clarification and report back to the Commission.

#### Crepe Myrtles

Mr. Maddux advised that Ms. Kesha Braunskill, State of Delaware Department of Agriculture's Urban and Community Program Director, recommended that the City wait until after several frosts before pruning the Crepe Myrtles.

#### Fundraising

Mr. Maddux advised that the Tree Advisory Commission needs more visibility, and tree enthusiasm in the City needs to be fostered with the help of Tree City USA and Arbor Day before fundraising efforts are begun. Mr. Savitch suggested that the Tree Advisory Commission utilize support from the media and local organizations to promote the efforts of the Commission

#### Projects Completed or In Progress

- A List of Acceptable Trees has been established for New Castle sidewalk plantings.
- The Tree Advisory Commission should approve all tree plantings in the City.
- Two walk-arounds have been completed to inspect sick and damaged trees in the City. Mr. Maddux expressed his hope that the Commission can work on identifying the Tree of Heaven in the City relative to the Spotted Lantern Fly. The Department of Agriculture wants the susceptible trees removed, and the Tree Advisory Commission is in a position to identify those trees and report to the City.
- The Tree Advisory Commission has partnered with the New Castle Community Partnership to raise money for planting trees. NCCP has donated \$2,000 to plant trees in New Castle, and \$750 has been collected in donations. Two articles were published in the newspaper.
- Mr. Maddux received a communication stating that Arbor Day has been cancelled for April 2021 due to COVID.
- The Tree Advisory Commission is focusing on Tree City USA to ensure the Commission is meeting their requirements. Ms. Braunskill will assist the Commission relative to Tree City USA.
- The Tree Advisory Commission is focusing on the Delaware Department of Agriculture Urban and Community Tree Grant. The Commission can apply for between \$500 to \$5,000 for New Castle relative to tree planting or tree management. The Tree Advisory Commission is working on becoming designated as a Tree Friendly Community and passing the Urban Tree Canopy Goal Resolution.
- Ms. Kesha Braunskill and Ms. Karen Davidson of the Delaware Department of Agriculture will meet with Mr. Maddux and Mr. Vukelich on Monday, September 21, 2020, at 3:00 pm for a tour of the City. Mr. Maddux invited the Commissioners to join them if possible.
- The City Annual Budget for Trees is \$5,000 for the fiscal year 2021, and is restricted to pruning. The Tree Advisory Commission will be represented at the next City Council Meeting in late September when Council will review the Budget to determine if additional funds are available to be apportioned to City initiatives. Mr. Maddux will

notify the Commissioners of the date. Councilperson Suzanne Souder is assisting the Commission in this matter.

- The Princeton Elm tree will be moved in early October. Mr. Maddux asked the Commissioners to submit their ideas for a suitable location on The Green to which the Princeton Elm tree can be moved. Mr. Savitch suggested contacting the local media to cover of the event.

#### New Projects

- Mr. Savitch suggested that the Commission document its accomplishments and present the data to City Council. Mr. Maddux noted that the Projects List he reviewed is a start to that documentation.
- Mr. Vukelich suggested that trees be planted in the area between 5<sup>th</sup> Street and 6<sup>th</sup> Street across from the cemetery. He has commitments for three trees in that area.
- Mr. Savitch proposed that he take pictures and/or video of any work being done relative to sidewalk repairs or tree work and submit that to local media to increase visibility of the Tree Advisory Commission. During discussion it was noted that before and after documentation would be preferred to on-site work in progress.

Because the Princeton Elm will be moved before the next TAC meeting, Mr. Maddux suggested that the Commissioners submit their recommendations for a site to him as soon as possible. In response to a suggestion that the entire Commission meet to determine a site for replanting, Ms. Burgmuller explained that if more than two Commissioners meet to conduct Tree Advisory Commission business it is considered a quorum and a public meeting, and as such, it must be properly noticed. Ms. Burgmuller added that a general walk-around to inspect trees may be considered an information-gathering workshop, but she cautioned the Commissioners not to discuss any business or make any decisions during those activities. Ms. Burgmuller will confirm this information.

Relative to the meeting with Ms. Braunskill and Ms. Davidson to learn how to apply for the State Grant, Mr. Maddux asked how many Commissioners can join the meeting. Ms. Burgmuller suggested that if it is an information session only, avoiding a quorum may not apply; however, she will double-check on this issue and advise the Commission. Mr. Maddux opined that the meeting is a Workshop to learn how to ensure the Commission does not miss a deadline for applying for Grant funding and that they must also verify that the City has a Canopy Resolution. Ms. Burgmuller stated that the City passed a Canopy Resolution in 2013, although she was unsure if that would suffice. Mr. Maddux reiterated that the Workshop is scheduled for Monday, September 21, 2020, at 3:00 pm at the Courthouse, and invited the Commissioners who are able to join the meeting.

There being no further business to discuss, a Motion to adjourn the meeting was made and seconded. On vote, the Motion was unanimously approved and the Meeting adjourned at 5:45 pm.

Kathy Weirich  
Stenographer